

North Lake Tahoe Bonanza SIERRA SUN

Sierra Conservation Groups Complete \$8M Deal to Protect Webber Lake, Lacey Meadows

Note: The Sierra Nevada Conservancy awarded \$1M to this project through its Prop. 84 grant program.

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TRUCKEE, Calif. — The Truckee Donner Land Trust and The Trust for Public Land, working together as part of the Northern Sierra Partnership, announced Friday the permanent protection of Webber Lake and Lacey Meadows, an extraordinary 3,000-acre property at the headwaters of the Little Truckee River northwest of Truckee.

The property will be opened to the public for the first time in more than a century when the snow melts next spring.

“This property has it all: 1,900 acres of pristine sub-alpine meadow, California history with Henness Pass Road and Webber Lake Hotel — one of the oldest standing structures in the region — and critical habitat for a number of threatened or endangered species,” said Perry Norris, executive director of the Truckee Donner Land Trust.

The organizations bought the property for \$8 million from Clifton and Barbara Johnson, whose family had owned the property for almost a century. The Johnsons used Lacey Meadows as a summer grazing site for their sheep, which they herded from their ranch near Roseville. The late Clif Johnson said the trip took 15 days up and 10 days back.



“This is truly a special occasion,” said Barbara Johnson. “Our wishes have been fulfilled, and the legacy of our family will be remembered. The beautiful lands we have worked on and cared for are, at long last, protected for future generations to enjoy forever.”

The property is rich in California history. Webber Lake, a 260-acre natural lake at the headwaters of the Little Truckee River, has been a private fishing campground since the 1860s. It was stocked with trout back then, one of the earliest known examples of sport fishing in the Sierra Nevada.

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Hennes Pass Road, once one of the most heavily traveled emigrant routes across the Sierra Nevada, runs past the lake. The Webber Lake Hotel, built in 1860, still stands on the property, the only remaining stagecoach hotel along the historic route.

The California Department of Fish and Game says the property provides critical habitat for a number of animals protected by state law, including the pine marten and the Sierra Nevada red fox. Other animals recorded on the property include black bear, mule deer, mountain lion, bald eagle, raptors, and the endangered willow flycatcher. The wildflower displays in Lacey Meadows are among the best in the Sierra and include lupine, larkspur, elephant heads, alpine buttercups, monkshood, and leopard lilies.

“This will provide exceptional recreation opportunities for people who visit and live in the northern Sierra,” said Dave Sutton, Northern California Director of The Trust for Public Land. “It was the largest piece of unprotected private land in the entire Little Truckee River watershed, and all but completes fifteen years of conservation work in the Little Truckee.”

The Truckee Donner Land Trust will own and manage the property. Its near-term plans include new trailheads along Hennes Pass Road and Meadow Lake Road, providing non-motorized access to Lacey Meadows. At the request of the Johnson family, the Land Trust will continue to lease the fishing campground to the current caretakers for four more years, after which the lake will be open to the public.

The California Wildlife Conservation Board, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and Northern Sierra Partnership all provided significant funding for the acquisition, as did numerous private individuals.

The property is the latest in a series of strategic acquisitions by the Northern Sierra Partnership to conserve the natural heritage of the Little Truckee River watershed. Since its launch five years ago, the Partnership has helped to conserve more than 14,000 acres in the watershed, including Independence Lake, Perazzo Meadows, Webber Falls and the Mt. Lola trail.

“The Little Truckee watershed is a hidden treasure, little known to the general public,” said Lucy Blake, President of the Partnership. “Go there and you won't be disappointed.” The Truckee Donner Land Trust preserves and protects scenic, historic and recreational lands with high natural resource values in the greater Truckee Donner region. Learn more at www.tdlandtrust.org.

Founded in 1972, The Trust for Public Land is the leading non-profit working to conserve land for people. Learn more at www.tpl.org.

The Northern Sierra Partnership is a collaborative initiative to conserve, restore, and enhance the magnificent natural landscape of the northern Sierra Nevada, and build the foundation for sustainable rural prosperity. NSP is a partnership of five organizations: the Feather River Land Trust, the Sierra Business Council, The Nature Conservancy, the Truckee Donner Land Trust, and The Trust for Public Land.

For information on visiting the Little Truckee River watershed, visit: www.northernsierrapartnership.org.